

By Faith, Not Works

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- [0 : 0 0] Did you know yesterday we had a federal election? Just in case you missed it, we did. I expect that most of you did know because it's been everywhere.
- It's been on TV, it's been on posters, and we even had a voting station right here in the church. When we voted, we have to put our trust, we had to put our trust in someone that we think can represent us the best.
- You had to choose someone who agrees with your views for what the government should do. You had to choose the person who would advocate for the things that you value.
- But let's face it, not all politicians are reliable. Well, most of them aren't, are they? And it gets especially hard to trust them with all the backstabbing we've had in the last decade.
- So some people give up on relying on others, and they decide to make their own party. They decide to run for parliament themselves. For example, you might know this guy.
- [1 : 1 5] Clive Palmer. I'm sure you've heard of him. But it's a lot of work to run for yourselves. It's a lot of money, as he would know. And they never actually win as the PM when you run on your own.
- It's only ever the big parties that get the best seat. In fact, he didn't get any seats, as far as I heard. Well, in today's passage, we're presented with a similar choice, although obviously it's a bit different.
- When it comes to being made right with God, we have to choose to put our trust, not in a politician, thankfully, but in Jesus Christ, God's Son.
- Or we could try to do it ourselves, like Clive Palmer did, to try and make ourselves right with God by our own works and our own effort. Now, it should be an obvious choice, right?
- It should be obvious which one is better. And yet, we still struggle with it, thinking that we need to do certain things to impress God. We're not alone.
- [2 : 2 3] The Galatian Christians struggled as well. Some of them were fooled into thinking that they had to add works of the Old Testament law to their faith to make themselves right with God.
- That is what justification means. We'll be talking about it a lot. It is to be counted right in God's sight. So Paul wrote to them to explain why our justification comes by faith alone in Christ and not by works of the law.
- Now, on to our first point in your outlines, if you've got them with you. Our first point is falling into faith plus law. Paul starts here with an example of when Peter did this same thing.
- So we start from verse 11. When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles.
- But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles, because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.

[3 : 35] The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy, even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, You are a Jew, and yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew.

How is it then that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? When Cephas, that's Peter, came to Antioch, Paul opposed him.

Now, Peter is pretty important in the church, so it's quite bold of him. It's like opposing the archbishop. But it wasn't for no reason, for Peter stood condemned.

And Paul goes on to explain why. Peter used to eat with the Gentiles. We might remember how God taught him this from Acts 10, when he went to Cornelius' house.

We can read in Acts 10, 28 and 29, which should be on the slide. There you go. Peter said to them, You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile.

[4 : 51] But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. Everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Here we see that the law said Jews should not associate with Gentiles, which includes eating with them. The only way Jews could eat with Gentiles was if Gentiles followed their law and became Jews.

But God had taught Peter that everyone, Jew and Gentile, is saved in the same way, by faith or trusting in Jesus. Then, when certain Jews arrived, Peter was afraid of them.

He fell back into the law of separation. And worse, other Jewish Christians followed him, even Barnabas. So, this forced the Gentiles to follow the Jewish law too and to separate or to become Jews to eat in fellowship with them.

In other words, it forced them to live by faith plus law. Now, if you want an example of this, recently we have the example of Brussels sprouts.

[6 : 07] Bear with me. Who likes Brussels sprouts? Brussels sprouts. Not many people. I'm still surprised. I thought no one likes Brussels sprouts. But it's okay.

When I was young, Mum tried to cook them for us once in our family and even she didn't like them. So, she never bought them again, which I was very happy about.

But, in the last couple of weeks, if you've been watching MasterChef, a number of the elite chefs have been using them on the show. So, now, because elite chefs are using them in their cooking, others are going to feel the pressure to add them to their meals.

Even if we know they're terrible. Now, it's in the same way Peter, the elite apostle, has added back these laws that Christians were free from.

Laws that even he had stopped following. And, as a result, the others felt pressure to follow them as well. And then, before you know it, they've all left the truth of the gospel, that we are saved by faith alone and they've added Jewish law.

[7 : 24] Now, the specific issue with Peter, the law of separation, is different to the issue for the Gentiles, which is the law of circumcision. But, that's actually really helpful for us.

Since it shows us that Paul's teaching to the Galatians is not only about one particular issue, but the general principle of living by faith plus works, rather than faith alone in Christ.

But, the only way to be counted right with God or to be justified is by faith and not law.

And, now Paul makes it very clear in our second point on the outline. So, this time we're going from 15. We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

So, we too have put our faith in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

[8 : 36] In verse 15, Paul's being sarcastic. In case you didn't notice, he's mimicking some of the Jews. The way he says, the Jews are better than the Gentiles.

But then, really, in 16, he shows us they're just as sinful. The Jews might think that they're better than sinful Gentiles, yet it turns out even they know they cannot be justified by their own works of the law.

Instead, they too need to put their faith in Christ to be made right with God. If anyone were going to be able to be justified by following the law, we expect it to be the Jews.

But if even they are justified by only faith, then how much more is it true for the Gentiles and for us? Verse 16 is the key verse for our passage and for the whole letter.

He spends the next few chapters in Galatians explaining how it is that we are justified by faith, not works. And the reason is here from verse 16, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

[9 : 54] We can't justify ourselves before God by our works. We can't do enough good things to make ourselves right with God. It's impossible.

But people like to try, don't they? All the other main religions are all about doing works. even Paul, we know, tried really, really hard to be the best Jew that he could before he met Christ.

A friend of mine was telling me about a colleague that he had, someone who liked to try out different religions. You may know somebody like that yourselves.

For a while, she had decided that she would be a Buddhist. Buddhist. So, every time they caught up, my friend would ask her how she was going. He'd say questions like, how are you going at being perfect?

Or, have you reached enlightenment yet? Are you almost there? Have you been perfect for this whole week? And naturally, she'd get really annoyed.

[11 : 02] Like any of us would. And she'd lose her patience and sometimes get angry. Which, ironically, meant that she had failed right then, hadn't she? And she'd lost all her progress.

The point is, no matter how hard we try to justify ourselves, it's impossible. But we know that there is another way, or rather, the only possible way of being justified.

It's by faith in Christ and not works of the law. As I said before, this is Paul's key point for the Galatians and for all of us too. So the rest of our chapter, he goes on to defend it in three ways.

We're at point three on the outline now. Paul has three defences. The first is in verse 17 and 18. Let's read.

But, if in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin?

[12 : 08] Absolutely not. If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker. Now, the question in verse 17 is the kind of thing Paul's opponents would ask.

They would say, if Jews have to put their faith in Christ, then aren't they admitting that they're sinners too? doesn't that mean following Christ makes people sinners?

Well, Paul's answer is clear, isn't it? Paul says, no, the Jews don't become sinners by turning to Christ, because they're already sinners, like everyone else.

Of course, Christ doesn't promote sin. Really, it's the other way around. Following the law is what makes them a sinner. See verse 18, if I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.

Paul's talking about the law. If he rebuilds the law, if he goes back to it for trying to be justified, it would show him to be a lawbreaker, because he can't keep it perfectly, just like my friend's Buddhist colleague.

[13 : 21] So, trying to be justified by works actually makes us sinners, since because we can't keep it, it instead makes our failure clear to everyone.

And this leads to Paul's second defense in verse 19 and 20. For through the law, I died to the law, so that I might live for God.

I've been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Paul says in verse 19, through the law, I died to the law. That is, through trying to keep the law, he realized he's a sinner. So, he must die to the law.

He must stop relying on it for salvation. Instead, he needs another way to be right with God, God. And that other way is Christ.

[14 : 25] See, verse 20, I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Christ's love for you and me meant he gave himself up for us at the cross. We know this, and it's always incredible. So, when Paul says he was crucified with Christ, he means his death counts as our death.

His crucifixion as our crucifixion. His payment of sin counts as our payment of sin. Just like when your football team wins, you would say, we won, even though you just sat there and watched.

their win still counts as yours. Here, even though we do nothing to deserve it, Christ's death counts as our death for sin.

We have been crucified with Christ. And that means we have a new life. Just like Warwick was explaining with the kids, it's a new spiritual life with Christ who lives in us.

[15 : 41] We are now right with God because of faith alone in Christ. So, we continue to live by faith alone in Christ. Then, Paul's third defense is in verse 21.

He makes it really clear that we cannot be justified by works. Verse 21 is this, I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.

If Christians could rely on good works to be right with God, then we are saying Christ's death was a waste of time. That it achieved nothing for us because we still have to add on our good works.

That means even Peter, when he was in Antioch, was by his actions proclaiming that Christ died for nothing. So, trying to make ourselves right with God through good works means three things.

We will show ourselves to be sinners because we keep failing. We'll return to the life that we've died to instead of the new life we have in Christ. And from verse 21, we'll be saying that Christ's death achieved nothing because we still have to save ourselves with good works.

[17 : 06] do you see how wrong it is to try and justify ourselves before God by our good works? Now, if you're not a Christian, and this is new to you, I'm glad you're here.

I really want to challenge you to keep thinking about it. In your own life, maybe you have been trying to live by good works. Maybe you've done quite well most of the time, but there's still a couple of things that you regret doing, or that you've struggled with and realised you couldn't do them.

Or maybe you're the opposite. Maybe you found it so hard and so stressful that you just thought about giving up on trying to live by good works. Maybe you realise, like Paul, that it's impossible.

I really want to challenge you to consider the other way of being made right with God, that we're justified by faith in Christ. I encourage you to keep learning about Jesus from the church, from the Bible, keep asking questions.

You can ask me or Vijay or whoever brought you along, if someone has brought you to church. And as they shared before, you can think about coming to the Christianity Explored that's starting next week.

[18 : 31] what we've read today is the main point of Christianity, that we can't be made right with God or earn our way to heaven by our good works, but instead it's by faith in Christ who gave himself up for us at the cross.

That is why it's good news. Now for everyone else, for the Christians, for us who are justified by our faith in Christ, we have an encouragement and we have a challenge.

First, the encouragement. Our salvation doesn't depend on us. That's a huge relief. I'm sure you're all nice people, but none of you are perfect.

None of us are perfect. Imagine for a moment if your salvation depended on how good you are. Just think about how you would go if it was all up to you.

You'd be in huge trouble, wouldn't you? But it's such a relief that it doesn't depend on you, isn't it? It's so calming, just as Sia shared with us before.

[19 : 53] So it's something we ought to be thankful for, isn't it? And not take it for granted. Then we also ought to praise God, don't we?

That he sent his son Jesus to die for our sin. That by faith in him, we can live, we can have life in him that is secure for all eternity.

you. And the challenge is this. Don't be a Peter. From here, elsewhere in the Bible, Peter's a great example of a disciple of Jesus.

But here, in what we've read, Peter added works of the law to faith, which led to not acting in line with the truth of the gospel.

Here, he's a bad example. So don't be a Peter. Because of our sin, it's so easy to go back to thinking that we can be justified by works we do.

[20 : 57] While they're not the same as the works Peter or the Galatians struggled with, it's the same idea. For example, we might start thinking that doing good, important religious works, like coming to church or having communion are the thing that saves us.

These are good and they're beneficial to us, but they are not how we are justified. Or, we might begin to think that our assurance of being saved depends on doing good moral deeds.

Doing good things for people is good. But, some Christians think it's because they are good that they will go to heaven.

They base their assurance on how good they are. Then what happens? What happens if I mess up? What if you mess up? What if you're having a bad day?

What if I get angry at someone because I'm just really hungry? We would worry that we might not make it to heaven. We'd worry that we fail to please God.

[22 : 12] Again, living rightly is good, but our salvation, our assurance, should be found only in Christ. The good work that we do comes after because of Christ living in us.

So, we do good works in response to justification, but they don't save us, since our justification comes by faith alone in Christ and not our works or deeds.

It's just as our next hymn says that we're going to sing, nothing in my hand I bring, but simply to your cross I cling.

We are not saved by works, but by faith alone. Lord God, our Father, thank you that Jesus has given himself up for us on the cross, that by faith in him we can have life, and that it is not through works.

Lord God, please help us to be thankful. faithful. Please help us to rely on that and to not begin to rely on our good works.

[23 : 33] We pray all of this in the name of your son Jesus. Amen.